A Comparative Study of the Character of *Omolúàbí* in An African Moral System and Nietzsche's Nobleman Theory in Western Ethics

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Abstract

This paper attempts to throw light on and show the fundamental similarities and dissimilarities between an African and Western ethical conceptions by examining the foundation of character ethics in the two systems, using the concept of *Omolúàbí* in an African moral system, and Nietzsche's Nobleman in western ethics as tools of comparative analysis. Indigenous African moral system revolves around character and character traits much more as it aims to analyse actions, as well as, motives of a moral agent. *Omolúàbí* is generally accepted character model among the Yorùbá who are dominantly in the West African sub-region. The virtues of *Omolúàbí* manifested in (*Ìwá*) character are such that promote co-operation, solidarity and interdependence of all interests towards common goal and harmonious relationship. This concept favourably compares with Friedrich Nietzsche's Nobleman character model, with the emphasis on the maximal use of instinct to achieve life ambitions. The idea of Nietzsche, we argue, compares with *Omolúàbí*. Both are rationalistic departure from supernaturalistic basis of morality but the limitation of Nietzsche is that morality and peaceful co-existence cannot be premised on self interest alone and the lure of nihilism. We contend that the pursuit of selfish interest and egoism may help in the achievement of goals but not sustainable outside of the general interest in human society. The failure to accord a place for general interest is precisely the limitation of Nietzsche's character model, which makes it an inadequate foundation of morality in line with social order. *Omolúàbí* of an African ethics via Yoruba worldview,

though not so watertight, is more humanistic and existentialist in orientation, thereby promoting collective interest, goodwill and peaceful coexistence. It is from this standpoint that we argue that the humanistic basis of *Omolúàbí* morality is more adequate for sustainable development in contemporary period.

Keywords: Character, African ethics, *omolúàbí*, morality and nobleman

Introduction

This study demonstrates how the ethos of *Omolúàbí* underscores indigenous morality among the Yorùbá nation in western part of sub-Saharan Africa. The ethos, emerging from the socio-cultural experience of the people is a prism through which materials of African ethics are deduced, critically examined and appropriated. In essence, Yorùbá ethos of *Omolúàbí* is a moral philosophy and a strand in African ethics. African ethics, as a core branch of African philosophy, may suffer over-generalisation without specific socio-cultural paradigmatic thought system. Hence, the imperative of culture-specific discourse like Akan ethics, Hausa morality, Igbo ethics and Yorùbá morality among others, all under the discourse of African ethics, and by implication African philosophy.

It must also be said that the Yorùbá are descendants of *Oduduwa* and remain one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa where they are most concentrated. The nation has over 40 million population across the West African sub region and about 21 per cent of the current Nigerian population (Ajayi & Akintoye, 2006: 280). They are predominantly in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, Kwara, Kogi and Edo States. Indigenous Yorùbá communities will also be found in neighbouring countries like Republic of Benin, Togo, Ghana and in South American countries like Brazil, Cuba and the Caribbean.
As a traditional society with unwritten culture, surviving original traditional values, like the concept of *Omolúàbí*, are best glean from oral literature. By oral literature, we mean the rich corpora of texts derivable from folklore, proverbs, poems, songs, tales, corpus and so

on that are presented in spoken form for the purpose of influencing the behaviour in a community (Awoniyi, 1975: 364). In fact, oral literature has proven to be important mnemonic tools through which the entire cultural values, history, beliefs and world-view are preserved and transmitted from one generation to the other.

Pairing likes with likes, we situate Yorùbá morality with a western paradigm to critically examine the humanistic foundation of ethics and morality in African thought system against Nietzsche's idea of Nobleman in western ethics. We shall examine the utility of the two moral paradigms towards collective well-being and social order that is the primary goal of moral philosophy. We begin by clarifying the notion of character and its philosophical interpretation to better situate the discourse.

Our survey of various African cultures shows that there is hardly an indigenous word for ethics or morality in African languages. Rather, ethics is a bi-product of daily practices among the Africans. Hence, the norm is to deploy certain indigenous words that are synonymous with character to mean ethics or morality of the peoples. For example, character in Igbo language means *agwa.* In other words, *Onwe ghi ezi agwa* in Igbo thought system would mean 'he has no morals'. Character for the Twi part of Akan in Ghana is called *suban*. To say "one has no morals or unethical" in Akan is to say *Onni suban*. Hausa in the northern part of Nigeria calls character *hali*. Popular saying among the people is *mugun halia gareshi* (he has a nasty nature or lacks good character) (see, Momoh, 2000 & Kirk-Greene, 2000: 247). Bear in mind that the act of narrowing ethics or morality down to character (i.e. character-ethics) is not unique to the Africans. For instance, borrowing from Ancient Greek language, Aristotle calls ethics the study/science of character (i.e. *he ethike*, in Greek word) (Aristotle, 1955: 23). Similarly, Islamic moral philosophy beginning from the Medieval period adopts *Akhlaq* (Arabic word for character) to mean ethics. What makes African character-ethics unique is that discourses or statements about morality turn out to be discourses or statements essentially about character.

By dictionary definition, character is the intrinsic goodness of a person, unfolding in actions that can be described as either good or bad. It is made up of traits, that is to say, a set of stable qualities (virtues) that are within, which influence outward actions. Moral virtues (i.e. excellences of character) are the intrinsic qualities and the subject matter of character, they include the general virtues like honesty, courage, diligence, fellow-feeling, empathy, sympathy, humility, justice, temperance and so on. Other virtues of less general status but defined by each community in line with its aspirations include: chastity before marriage, respect for elders, right use of words, mastery of language and use of proverbs among others. It follows from the foregoing that character or consistent demonstration of virtues is the basis upon which a person is described as moral or good fellow and to be lacking in virtues is to be immoral or bad fellow (cf. Omoregbe, 1993: 139). Character constitutes the moral dimension of human personality. In fact, a person's character is his or her moral make-up.

Specifically, from the broad spectrum of philosophy, character is the pathway to understanding the *being,* as well as its nature as exhibited in actions that define morality. In other words, character manifests ones' being. Thus, character underscores both the *existence* and *morality* of man (Abimbola, 1975: 165). For instance, in Akan and Yorùbá traditional communal thoughts, a good character is synonymous with being a *person*, dubbed as *oye onipa* in Akan and *o s'eniyan* in Yorùbá language. A bad fellow is *Kii s'eniyan* (a mere caricature of person) for the Yorùbá (cf. Idowu, 1962: 155). Therefore, to be moral is conceptually tied to existence or personhood.

In African ethics, character is defined in term of habits, words, deeds and activities. Character is the configuration of individual personality and action. The developmental ability of character implies the possibility of moral reform and change. It is for this reason that people are held responsible for their character. Character, in a Hausa proverb, is said to be like a line drawn on a rock; nobody can erase it. And a Yorùbá proverb remarks that *Ìwá l'ewa* (character is beauty); *obirin so'wa nu, oni oun o l'ori oko* (a women lost out in good

character and she is complaining that she has no luck for husband). It is character that promotes ontological balance and harmonious peaceful coexistence between man and man, man and the gods, ancestors, divinities and society at large.

Concept of *Omolúàbí* in an African Ethics

African ethics is the critical reflection on the matter or nature of life, conduct, behaviour and character of the African. It is the "the conceptualization, appropriation, contextualization and analysis of values within the African cultural experience" (Azenabor, 2010: 161). The concept of *Omolúàbí* is a subset of such values and it is popular among the Yorùbá ethnic group. It is an indigenous concept that denotes the idea of morality, moral being or ideal character acceptable to all and tells of the philosophical tradition of the people. Importantly, however, ideas of *Omolúàbí* are till date found in the peoples' oral tradition, especially in forms of proverbs, myths, folklores, and tales among other symbolic legacies. According to *Ifá* literary corpus, *Omolúàbí* is understood as the basis of societal and social ethics.

Omolúàbí is a well-behaved person. It is a psycho-cultural underpinning of values and guiding principle of all human struggle and condition. *Omolúàbí* is a Yorùbá ethical conceptualization of thought and consciousness. It is central and critical to social relations and anchored firmly on the nature of human existence. It can compare favourably with Aristotelian *Magnanimous man* and the *Golden mean doctrine*, Kantian *Universalizability* theory, Bentham's *Utilitarianism*, Hare's *Prescriptivism* and Nietzsche's *Nobleman*. But while these are produced by written tradition, the Yoruba's is based on oral and undocumented knowledge, only made available in recent literatures.

Omolúàbí as a value system allows for preferences, choices and freedom, but it abhors and condemns excesses (as does the *Golden mean*). *Omolúàbí* has come to mean high regard for honour and integrity. It has meaning in relation to others, relatives than self.

Omolúàbí is the Yoruba's morality which sustains the *molebi* and *ebi*, that is, relations and community in the closely-nit social system.

For the Africans, to be is to exist in proverbs, myths, folk tales, music and others expressing the people's mythology. The following are *Omolúàbí* maxims, proverbs and verses in *Ifa* literary corpus:

Maxims on *Omolúàbí*
    i. *Ìwá l'esin* (character is the ultimate religion) (Abimbola, 1977: 155)
    ii. *Ìwá l'ewa* (character is a person's beauty)
    iii. *Ìwá l'óbá awure* (character is the best mystical protections)
    iv. *Ìwá rere lèsó ènìyan, ehín funfun lèsó èrin* (Just as white teeth enhance a laugher, so does a good character befit a person) (Abraham, 1970: 328)

Proverbs on *Omolúàbí*
    i. *Abo oro l'a so fun Omolúàbí; to ba de inu e, a d'odindi* (A word is sufficient for the wise)
    ii. *Omolúàbí kii ta'fa k'o ma wa a* (*Omolúàbí* follows a course to its end)
    iii. *Ìwà lòrìsà; báabá ti hùú ní í fi gbeni* [character is like an *òrìsà* (deity); if we worship well, we get its protection, and if we behave well, we benefit] (Abraham, 1970: 328)
    iv. *Iponju kii mu Omolúàbí k'o di abese* (*Omolúàbí* betrays no character even in hardship)

Ifa literary Corpus on *Omolúàbí*
i.   *Iwa nikan l'osoro o,*
     Iwa nikan l'osoro;
    Orikan ki'buru l'otu Ife,
    Iwa nikan l'osoro o.

(Character is all that is requisite,
Character is all that is requisite;
There is no destiny to be called unhappy in Ife city,
Character is all that is requisite) (Abimbola, 1977: 156).

ii.   *Iwapele l'ókun aye fi'ropeti l'owo eni.*
         O da 'fa fun Orunmila
         Ti o nlo fi iwa gba okun aiye l'owo okan-le-ni-'irinwo imale.

(Gentle character is it which enables the rope of life to stay unbroken in one's hand.
So, declares the oracle to *Orunmila*
Who by means of gentle character was going to win the rope of life from the four
hundred and one divinities) (for more information see, Abimbola, 1975: 396-399).

The foregoing examples from oral literature vividly show how character, dimensioned as *Omolúàbí* and *Iwà*, weaves into the general thought system of the Yorùbá. Briefly, we have seen *Omolúàbí* and *Iwà* in connection to religion, godliness, aesthetic value, epistemology, moral values and social justice among others. Subsequent subsections will throw light on their inseparability.

Drawing from the ontological analysis of *eniyan* (man) and existence in traditional Yorùbá thought system earlier remarked on in this study, the following assumptions are made: (i) it is an imperfect world, ruled by multiplicity of good and evil forces; (ii) forces influence and are influenced in turn; (iii) man, at the centre of the muddle, is vulnerable and (iv) there is a prevailing law of reciprocity.

It is in the light of these socio-cultural assumptions that Yorùbá hinge morality or appropriate mode of behaviour on the doctrine of *Ìwàpèlé* (cf. Abimbola, 1975: 394 & Fayemi, 2009: 169).Doctrine is used as a set of common beliefs that serve as governing principle of life, conducts and order among a people. *Ìwàpèlé* falls into this category in the Yorùbá thought system. Obviously, the doctrine conjoins two words, namely: *Ìwà* (character) and *pèlé* (gentle/mild).Literally and as precise as English lexicon can offer, both add up to mean "mildness of character" (Abraham, 1970: 328). Synonymous terms of *Ìwàpèlé* are *Ìwà rere* (good character), *Ìwà jéjé* (gentle character), *Ìwà tùtú*

(temperate character) and *Ìwà irele* (humble character). From the above, mildness, gentility, temperance and humility all point to a conscious state of mind that implies ontological understanding, with the discipline to exercise caution and self-restraint in all state of affairs. In other words, *Ìwàpèlé* can be defined as a phenomenological disposition to life, based on wisdom and understanding of the workings of reality within the socio-cultural context of the Yorùbá.

For emphasis, it may then be asked, what are the virtues of *Omolúàbí* inherent in the doctrine of *Ìwàpèlé*? Scholars have identified a handful (see, Idowu, 1962; Abimbola, 1975; Awoniyi, 1975; Bewaji, 2006; Fayemi, 2009; Yoloye, 2009 & Ajadi, 2012 and so on). They include the following, namely: (i) *suuru* (patience); (ii) *òwò* (humility/respect); (iii) *òrò-íre* (good/right choice of words); (iv) *otito* (honesty/integrity); (v) *ogbón inú* (intelligence/understanding); (vi) *ìwòn-tún-wòn-sì* (moderation) and (vii) *akin* (courage). While the list is longer, these are some basic qualities that standout the *Omolúàbí*. Indeed, these qualities help to promote social integration and well-being of the community. *Omolúàbí* is built on the foundation of honour, integrity, duty and expectations.

A corollary of *Omolúàbí* is *Ìwà. Ìwà* is central to the Yoruba ethical and moral theory. There is the saying that *Ìwá l'esin* (character is religion). Character is all pervasive, it is the ornament of personhood, it is the essence of being. *Ìwà* complements all things good and beautiful. A person is evaluated for better or for worse according to his or her character (*Ìwà*).

Good character is an harbinger of peace and war; the engine of culture and civility, the hallmark of conversational prudence and epitome of intellectual maturity. *Ìwà* adds value to a person becoming an *Omolúàbí*. WandeAbimbola (1975: 395) opines that *Omolúàbí* is a function of exhibiting and demonstrating the inherent virtue and value of *Ìwàpèlé*, which is a good and gentle character. *Omolúàbí* culminating in *Iwapele* is the basis of moral conduct in Yoruba culture. So, *Ìwàpèlé* is the core defining attribute of *Omoluabi*. In

conceptualizing Omoluabi, three other elements come to the fore. They are: *iteriba* (respect), *inurere* (good mind) and *Iwa* (character).

Iwaibaje (bad character), *eewo* (taboo), *abuku* (calamitious action), *aidaa* (wickedness) are all used in judgment, discipline and evaluation of character and or conduct. *Itiju* (shame) is a sign of respect, reverence and regard for whom it applies or relates to. Shame here is in the positive sense, it is a moral virtue (*onitiju*), whose opposite is *alainitiju*, i.e. an immodest and shameless person. *Itiju* is also in a sense conscience – the highest level of moral development. The fear of being put to shame or being disgraced is the basis of all moral principles in Yoruba ethical system.

Concept of Nobleman in Nietzsche
It is not uncommon to find the word noble or "nobility of birth" defining character or social approval in the western society. One of the philosophers that really feature the concept is the German existentialist, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Though he never claimed to be an existentialist, but he is one of them in thoughts and themes with focus on the existential conditions of man. His thoughts culminate into works like *Genealogy of Morals*; *Beyond Good and Evil*; *The Will to Power*; *Thus Spake Zarathustra*; *Twilight of the Gods* and *Esse Homo* among others.

Nietzsche lived in the 19th Century, a period in European history characterized by advances in sciences and exploration. While innovations in medicine enhanced clinical understanding of human anatomy, disease prevention and consequent accelerated population growth in the west, advances in exploration led to the discovery of new worlds in continents like Africa and Asia. Therefore, while new form of liberalism held sway in Europe, imperialism made waves abroad. It was also one of the notable periods of reforms and military conflicts in Europe. There were three wars in succession and Nietzsche was part of the Franco-Prussian War as a medical aid.
Nietzsche assessed the period that he lived as one implicitly driven by the thought that "Europe wishes to become one" (Nietzsche, 1995: 195) and everything spurs towards "Europe, one Europe, whose soul

pushes outward and upward through all manifold and impetuous art" (Hubben, 1968: 97). Nietzsche observed that the implosion of "united Europe" (Ibid: 116) was under the wrong atmosphere of Judeo Christian morality and Greek rationalism that formed the foundation, yet considered alien to the Germanic culture, rendering European civilisation despicably weak and decadent for the set goal (Denise & Peterfreund, 1992: 261).

As a rescue mission, Nietzsche waged a double demolition attack on traditionalism; that is deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional morality of the Greek rationalism and Christian virtues of the Judeo-Christian religion. In the deconstruction exercise against earlier philosophies, he was critical of modern and enlightenment ideas traced back to Socrates on one hand. On the other hand, he vented his aspersion on European idealism and rationalism for conjecturing a rational universe and absolute morality through the human reason.

While considering moral values as subjective and relative, Nietzsche launched a rebuttal against Socrates, Plato and other rationalists like Kant and Schopenhauer for promoting the concept of ultimate Good, absolute morality with God-like complexes, standard values and obligatory duty to morality. The reason is that the so-called absolute morality that accommodates free will, responsibility, guilt and selflessness are anti-human and hindrance for man to attain higher life. It is, therefore, along this line that Azenabor (1996: 72) wrote: "there is no such thing as moral truth and falsity apart from a given code, which depends on human choice and convention. There are no absolutes values; all values are man's creation – expressing a certain perspective." Nietzsche argues that rather than uplift the centrality of instinctive will (i.e. will to power), which is natural in all human, the rationalists deified reason, conceiving man as a rational animal with reason becoming an end in itself, instead of facilitating and organising the apparatus of action in the functional drive for power.

Nietzsche's second deconstructive assault is closely related to the former, and it is against Judeo-Christian morality, which he condemned as slave and decadent morality. Christianity among other religions, he notes, is the most "seductive lie" that has ever existed, a

morality of "paltry people; a repugnant kind of degeneracy that civilization has ever yet brought unto existence" (Nietzsche, 1992: 270-271). Nietzsche's discontent is that, first, Christianity promotes slave morality; second, the religion is led by Church priests who secretly will to power. The church leaders exploits the clueless adherents by deceiving them into denial of life, negating the fine impulse of great accumulation of strength, the aim of which is to keep the people suppressed in the fold (Ibid: 272).

In the slave morality that religion promotes, the strong and powerful are regarded as evil, while the sufferers are the good. The man who is weak, ill and lazy that should be wiped out, according to Nietzsche, turns out to the good man (see, Azenabor, 1996: 73). Christian virtues like sympathy, selflessness, kindness, helping hands, warm heart, patience, humility, friendliness, dread of pain and longing for bliss are nothing but religious neurosis that have since drained life of its valour, strength and meaning (Ibid). Nietzsche likens Christianity to a ladder with many rungs:

> It has many rungs but three of them are of the greatest importance. The first is the sacrifice of men to one's God, perhaps those men in particular whom one most loved. The second rung, attained in the moral period of mankind, is the sacrifice to one's god of one's strongest instincts, one's 'natural man'. And finally, what remains that could be sacrificed? Don't we in the end have to sacrifice everything consolatory, future blessedness and justice? Don't we have to sacrifice God himself and idolized a rock, the forces to stupidity, of gravity, fate, nothingness – all in order to be sufficiently cruel to ourselves? To sacrifice God for

> nothingness – this is the paradoxical mystery of ultimate cruelty that remained in store for the generation now growing up (Nietzsche, 1995: 62-63).

Consequently, Nietzsche submits that since morality is all about experimentation, why not experiment new ideas of transvaluation of values such as going beyond the current fog in distinguishing between good and evil? His plan was to take man back to nature, where life was on autopilot of self-integration, organisation and self-transcendence. He argues that all men naturally and instinctively "will to power" and self-overcome (Schroeder, 2005: 132). To this innate quest of man, there is no need for God or the thought of him because "God is dead". Nietzsche declares: "Not only was God dead, but also man as god; and the task was not merely to naturalise man, but equally to prevent his being denaturalized, turned into sand, grains of infinite sand, which is in effect the modern intension" (cited by Blackham, 1965: 195).

The task of nature, according to him, is to make man non-Christian and modern man pre-Socratic. The pre-Socratic dream is not far-fetched. Nietzsche was much impressed by the vitality of ancient Greco Roman civilisation and by the grim realism of the contemporary evolutionary principle of survival of the fittest. For Nietzsche, Christian morality has lost its God just as traditional rationalism lost its reason. Death of God or total erosion of His thought for human mind is therefore the freedom of man and by implication, the birth of new morality – master morality of the nobleman. The new morality simply turns the table against slave morality of old for life affirmation, rise to life in its exercise of the natural will to life or the will to power. In the *Genealogy of Morals,* Nietzsche remarks:

> That everywhere aristocratic, noble (in the social sense), is the root idea, out of which have necessarily developed 'good' in the sense of 'with

> a soul of high calibre', 'with a privileged soul' – a development which invariably runs parallel with that other evolution by which 'vulgar', 'plebian', 'low' are made to change family into 'bad' (cited by Denise & Peterfreund, 1992: 265).

The nobleman or noblemen, as the case may be, are his aristocratic class and are moral revolutionaries. They are future new sets of philosophers that are called free spirits, fashioned after non-Christian virtues and pre-Socratic in outlook to life. The nobleman is beyond, besides, above and ahead of conventional good and evil classification of moral actions; beyond the shackled of social morality. His task is indeed to turn the course of history and change the fortunes of European culture. He is to save western civilisation from total eclipse, from decadence and hypocrisy of traditional European morality of modern rationalist philosophers and Judeo-Christian religious leaders.

Certain qualities single out the idea of Nietzsche's nobleman. These qualities are as follows:
- independent creator of moral values;
- impulse to power and glory;
- spartan discipline;
- courage;
- duty only to the equals; and
- egoistic nature.

Nature is the springboard of ideal character of nobleman, who is to act by uncensored instinct. Traditional western morality erred by imposing moral norms on man's natural instinct, as if the norms are deductible from nature. The norms are made by 'slaves', having higher numerical strength to shackle naturally ambitious man and account for the reign of traditional 'slave morality'. The reverse is the case for the nobleman. His, is an independent morality and master morality; as freely created by him is not in the absolute form. True morality of the master race, Nietzsche says, must build from the

immediate sense of power that people can feel from within. Good or evil actions are not ironclad logic; rather a wide pool for every free spirit to sift from, to suit the instinctive will (see, Denise & Peterfreund, 1992: 265). In other words, nothing is intrinsically good or bad but thinking and self-interest make them so.

Nietzsche's nobleman is the aristocrat, but one that is above humility and below pride and vanity. He is opposed to these traditional views of Christian ethics, which he replaced with 'master morality' of the aristocratic class. According to Nietzsche, "Christianity is to be condemned for denying the value of pride, pathos of distance, great responsibility, exuberant spirits, splendid animalism, the instincts of war and of conquest, the deification of passion, revenge, anger, voluptuousness, adventure, knowledge," (cited in Russell, 2005: 691-692) many of which were missing in the general survey of nobleman. In fact, Nietzsche's true virtue of nobility is not a general notion, rather of an aristocratic minority.

Unlike Aristotelian *magnanimous man* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1955), Nietzsche did not advocate for eugenic principle of procreation for his aristocratic noble class, but implicit is that, nobility is biological. As cited by Russell, "No morality is possible without good birth," Nietzsche states, and "they have usually been a conquering race or a hereditary aristocracy... the individuals of the superior race and their descendants, are more likely to be 'noble', ...they will have more strength of will, more courage, more impulse towards power, less sympathy, less fear and less gentleness" (Russell, 2005: 694). Nietzsche's nobleman is akin to a war lord or warrior, schooled in Spartan discipline of warfare and a super human with duty only to his equals.

Nietzsche apparently has an eye for the future's free-spirits, equipped with Spartan training and discipline right from the youth. They are the vanguards for the transvaluation of values; the exceptionally free spirit, intellectually firm to receive the tutelage and not the common herd that are the current precarious model of human condition. He reintroduced the notion of Spartan discipline in the makeup of the

nobleman, describing it as key to nature, as essentially the will to power in "a brutal and savage contest to strength, characterized by frightfulness and tragedy, bloodshed, suffering and cruelty" (Ibid: 264). It is clear that life for Nietzsche is more of a battlefront and only the ruthless stands a chance of survival. Weaklings are *persona non grata* in the brutal test of courage. Sympathy for those going down is forbidden but cruelty, because contest for survival is the hard fact of life.

He adds that Christian morality failed to take cognizance of inequalities among human beings. He argues that if people are by nature unequal in gift, strength and aspirations, why should Christian ethics promote classless society such as is contrary to provisions of nature? It amounts to gross injustice to accord equal lot to botched and bungle masses on one hand, and the noble and superman on the other; to demand equal duty from weak/lazy and the strong; or task both the witted and imbecile with one assignment; accord special respect to corrupt politician and business magnate; or in fact, treat a pauper and millionaire as equals.

While Nietzsche robs the poor and weak of sympathy, ethics of the nobleman are premised on self love and egoism. He denied that altruism is possible, because no one can do 'for nothing sake'. It is contradictory and paradoxical in terms because to do 'for nothing sake' is still a motive of action – 'doing for nothing sake'. Moreover, even the so-called philanthropists want to be seen at least as one or acting because the holy writ deemed it imperative and the philanthropists would want his reward in the after-life. So, where lies the selfless deed, when according to Nietzsche, we are necessarily self-centered? (cf. Azenabor, 1996: 73).

Comparative Critique

The precarious nature of human being in the world features in the two moral paradigms. While Nietzsche puts the human existential condition succinctly in observing that man has become a stranger to himself in the scheme of modernisation and in need of redemption,

radically looking further backwards, even farther than the theistic existentialist and back to the pre-Socratic period, Yorùbá's indigenous moral approach turns to the pre-colonial morality of the Africans. Central to both is the philosophy that delves deeply into the heart of human condition; outcome of which is the need for radical revisit of human value system.

Quite similar of the two approaches is the refusal to ground ethics and morality on supernaturalistic basis. The Yorùbá tradition of thought reckons with Olodumare (God) as the centre of existence and saddled with ontological justice as the final arbiter (Idowu, 1962: 38-47 & Oluwole, 1984: 21). It is not far-fetch to see the morality of *Omolúàbí* in this light. The Yorùbá's epistemic outlook on reality recognizes, without contradiction, the Supreme Being is a necessary part of cosmic reality and intellectually agreeable like the Kantian sense. However, and as we have noted earlier, the apex of our moral pyramid-like outlook is not the supernatural Being, rather the humanistic essence (see, Oluwole, 1984: 21). In as much as man recourses to his gods in worship, prayer and supplication, he does so in complement of human effort, especially when such had proven inadequate. The goal of Yorùbá's *Omolúàbí* is to live peacefully with the community and other intelligent forces in nature in one indivisible whole. He recognizes that his duty is not for duty-sake, rather for human upliftment in the community. Even, to this similar humanistic course, the gods are also adjudged to be committed, as the ground of their being in the ontological structure. *Omolúàbí* is, therefore, to promote humanistic course, whose reward is the fulfillment of existential harmony and life of bliss in the otherworld.

Sequel to the foregoing exposition and analysis, both moralities are existentialist in outlook, bothering on human condition. According to William Barrett, Nietzsche's works are immense observation on the condition of human nature, which in the view of Nietzsche is one that can never be understood as an animal species within the zoological order of nature, because he has broken free from confines of nature and has thereby posed the question of his own meaning *cum* that of nature and what destiny has in stock for him (Barrett, 1962: 170-180).

Scholars on Yorùbá concept of *Omolúàbí* ask the question on the ideal character model that is adequate in meeting the socio-cultural goal of harmonious living. While Nietzsche submits that there is no intellectual, scientific objectivity or religious ultimate true story to account for human condition (as there is no more 'the human nature' but from subjective individuals in varying existential conditions), he advances a monistic view of human plight for his nobleman. Without denying inequality in human capabilities and potential, Nietzsche opts for the strongest and the denial of human facticity like natural weakness.

Meanwhile, a pluralistic conception of human nature and attendant morality of the Yorùbá socio-cultural experience accommodates the dynamism inherent in human nature and the dangers of condensing profiles or reality in one monistic account, constitution or perception. This explains a popular saying among the Yorùbá that: *eda o l'aropin*, that is, human being is indeed an endless possibilities or cannot be a write off. These statements strengthen the fact that no condition is permanent. In essence, human being is capable of love as well hate, cruelty and sympathy, strength and weakness and in all these; there is no finitude or permanence in his acts. Hence, he cannot be adjudged as entirely bad and meant for the iron-hand as Nietzsche suggests, as he is equally capable of good virtues as well. In the communitarian outlook, therefore, even though his death is personal, he is not alone in the fate as it is the case with his facticity.

Nietzsche's approval of the strongest character is personal and psychological. It was first aimed at giving himself a mental succor against the reality of poor health and vitality. In line with this position, Barrett (1962:180) observes that Nietzsche's thought was out of tune with reality having been produced by a mind that has not only lost touch in communicating with real world, but also owned by one of the loneliest man that has ever lived. And having tied his personality to his works, criticisms of Nietzsche have not distinguished between the two either. Therefore, Barrett described his "fantasies, delusions and grandiose inflation of ego as only sickly and lonely, emotionally starved ghostly figure, fleeting from place to place in search of

healing, but one that is also more often than not homeless; a dwarf reality that is of the imagined giant about whom he boasts" (1962:182).

Sickly nature, human weakness and limitations are grim facts of life that cannot be wished away. Nietzsche wishes for a generation of noblemen that he is by nature not endowed to be among and anticipates a society that he would never have survived in either. In one of his blanketed judgment, Nietzsche condemned women as weaklings and a set-back to the ambition of the strong; yet, as Russell (2005: 696) remarks, a handful of such women would have snuffled life out of him in a physical contest. With more discretion, the morality of *Omolúàbí* promotes compassion and like the golden rule principle, doing unto others as one would want others to do to him, in similar circumstance. Though there is role differentiation in the community and among gender, men and women are intrinsically equal, just as the mighty and the lowly. No amount of industry can make the *Omolúàbí* character model to lord it over others in the same community. He realizes that he is, just because others are. *Omolúàbí* exercises his freedom within the context permissible to others, which is a constraint to absolute freedom that Nietzsche celebrates.

Based on the foregoing exposition and analysis of the two traditions, what do we make of their humanistic outlook? As concepts with characteristic features in existentialism, both are aimed at human benefits and well-being is the focal point. While *Omolúàbí* of the Yorùbá, in line with African humanism theoretically sets out to benefit all cadre of men in the community or humanity at large, nobleman of Nietzsche is addressed to edify the individual and very few strong men. In fact, it purported the world for the strongest, who are laws unto themselves in a manner that is more nihilistic than humanistic. Both terms require some elucidation.

Humanism is an outlook or system of thought that attaches prime importance to human, rather than divine or supernatural forces. Foremost humanist, Jim Herrick (2006:1) notes that: "the emphasis is on the human, the here-and-now, the human. Humanists are atheists

or agnostics and do not expect an afterlife. It is essential to humanism that it brings values and meaning to life. It is an approach that is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but realistic." Essence and source of morality are human and societal needs. The highest level of morality is developed personally as the individual moves towards an idea of personal and social goodness. This morality adequately combines contentment, happiness with social responsibility and harmony. Human recognizes that the idea of perfect society is at best utopian. But with every individual (in their importance) contributing to the commonwealth, rendering human solution to human problems, a more realistic rather than optimistic or pessimistic outlook to life is brought about.

Meanwhile, nihilism is the doctrine of 'nothing' or that nothing of a general class exists, or is knowable and valuable. Nietzsche defines a nihilist as "one who judges of the world as it exists that it should not be, whereas he says of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist" (see, Hubben, 1968: 121). It is probably more accurate to call a man a nihilist who considers life as meaningless, without moral law, devoid of values to common men, and without the prospect of a hereafter (Ibid).

Ethical nihilism is the denial of the vitality of all distinctions of moral values, though a troubled road least travelled by moral philosophers because of its denial of possibility of all ethical philosophy (Dagobert, 1971: 210). However, a "less pure ethical nihilism sometimes appears as an intermediate stage in a philosophy which wishes to deny the validity of all previous systems of values as a preliminary of substituting a new one in their places" (Ibid). In between the extremes of pure nihilism and less pure ethical nihilism, Nietzsche's nobleman has either been lauded as a call to personal responsibility or lambasted as a recipe for inhumane society as anchored on meaninglessness. There is no doubt that Nietzsche's deconstructive agenda of traditional values and Christian morality sets the stage for nihilism. However, Nietzsche did not leave the moral foundation fallow without new moral codes. And "it is because Nietzsche filled

this vacuum and did not leave the world in nothingness, that absolved him from the accusation of nihilism" (Azenabor, 1996: 75).

We have earlier noted that most implicit in both concepts is the question of individual morality; asking the question on how best the individual should nourish himself in order to grow into a higher individual or moral stature. With the nobleman, it ends with the individual or herd of noblemen, but with *Omolúàbí* model, it ends with the society. As Barrett (1962: 192) observes, "so far as Nietzsche attempts to make the goal of his higher individual the goal of mankind, a fatal ambiguity appears within his ideal itself." Nietzsche laments the condition (slave-morality) of modern man but rather than theorize a transvaluation of mankind through master morality into humane entities, he succeeded in setting the stage for man's inhumanity to man. Conversely, the *Omolúàbí* model fairs differently, as it sets the agenda for a more humane world.

Indeed, the humanism of *Omolúàbí* emphasizes the uniqueness of African person, his or her dignity and cultural paradigm. The unique domestication or application of humanism to African experience is what Oluwole calls "African Humanism" (see, Azenabor, 2010: 110-133). Essentially, "African humanism as an African thought system stresses relationships among people in society that is interdependent, rather than sole descriptions of individual events in human experience or individualism" (Ibid: 125). And in consonance with the overriding theory of African Ontology (see, Azenabor, 2010: 79-86), the notion of *Omolúàbí* is moved by the spirit of interdependence, which empathises and as well emphasizes co-existence rather than conquest in nature and the world. In as much as there is solidarity with the human course in African cultural experience, it would not be out of place to say that *Omolúàbí* is also very compassionate and sympathetic to human limitations in the community. In the scheme of things, therefore, the attitude is that of selfish interest or aggression to outplay others, rather of solidarity and cooperation with general interest.

Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing that an African and a western moral paradigm possess humanistic foundation of morality rather than supernaturalistic basis. Although religion, God and the gods are part of the ontological architecture of an African tradition of thought, African morality or ethics is grounded on human rationality, the *Omolúàbí*; aligning self-interest with that of the whole. Nietzsche argues that since religion has historically failed and God is dead, man is left to himself to decide morality in accordance to his instinct and promote self-interest. Whereas an African humanistic moral paradigm of *Omolúàbí* engenders collective interest to achieve social order and sustainable development, a western humanistic ethical model of Nietzsche's nobleman emphasizes nihilism, egoism and more conflicts in human society. Therefore, it is on this basis that an African ethics via Yoruba moral concept of *Omolúàbí* is more adequate for sustainable development in contemporary period than Nietzsche's nobleman model, given the former's interpersonal and co-existent nature.

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